

## **Clashes of Civilizations gave Rise to Martial Arts, but Enlightened Martial Philosophies Reveal the Better Way**

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Human beings have studied how bodies can move from time immemorial. Some of those studies have focused on the disciplined development of various skills, like acrobatics, dance and martial art. Millennia of genocides, wars and lesser atrocities have concentrated more attention on the latter than the former, although the former are more beautiful. Thoughtful practitioners of the deadly forms have often devoted considerable thought to ethics or other philosophies that should accompany their craft. This is especially important in martial arts, because to teach those skills means arming people for life with deadly capabilities. So thoughtful teachers in particular have had to worry often about what their students might do with skills once learned.

Most of this brief review will be academic history, since ISCSC is a Comparative Civilizations Society, but one of the truisms of martial art is that it is never strictly 'academic.' Words on paper cannot begin to express some things at the heart of the art. Therefore, I will begin with a very modern example, towards which the history leads, and end with a physical demonstration. The modern example is the attempt to teach martial ethics to soldiers in the context of learning technique. The soldiers are US Marines who study the forms described by the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program (MCMAP) adopted in 2001 CE (1) and logoed thus:



Marines, as a category of human beings, are not notoriously recommended as ethics instructors. But everyone knows that Marines know how to fight, including Spetsnaz special forces of Russia the assassins of MOSSAD in Israel, and our own Navy Seals and Delta Force Commandos. Indeed, warriors all over our earth know about the skills of other warriors, including groups more secret than the Marines, Spetsnaz or Seals, because teaching our replacements is a common duty. Martial arts are especially intimate. We share techniques across schools and styles like professionals anywhere in any field, except that our instruction tends to be more personal, face to face, in arenas where failure brings pain quite predictably. So the great traditions of Asian martial arts from China, Japan and Korea principally have merged with the lessons of ancient Greece and Rome, and transformed when encountering unusual families like the Gracies of Brazil, and morphed when encountering practical lessons learned by organized armed forces like the Marines and Spetsnaz, etc. merging into one great domain of skill that goes by many names.

One is “Tao Do” or “The Way, way” in Chinese and Korean. This style requires memorizing 12 ‘moral’ lessons of the Tao Do that are distinct from physical technique. The first is: Remember, **“What must a Warrior always remember? Violence is the last resort of the incompetent.”** We will return to Tao Do briefly when breaking some boards or some bones in our lab exercise. Tao Do is especially concerned with making Warriors safe for polite society.

The modern Marine Corps Martial Arts Program (2) declares: The **Marine Corps Martial Arts Program (MCMAP)** is a combat system developed by the United States Marines to combine existing and new hand-to-hand and close quarters combat (CQC) techniques with morale and team-building functions *and instruction in the Warrior Ethos*. The program, which began in 2001, trains Marines (and U.S. Navy personnel attached to Marine units) in unarmed combat, edged weapons, weapons of opportunity, and rifle and bayonet techniques. *It also stresses mental and character development, including the responsible use of force, leadership, and teamwork.* [The highlights are the present author’s to emphasize the embedded moral instruction elements.]

Warriors of the Tao Do are stricter than Marines on the restraint component, since we teach that any use of violence represents a failure of other kinds. But Marines are also far more active in daily combat somewhere on this earth, almost always involving weapons much more powerful than fingers, and under command systems that reduce or even punish individual initiative and responsibility. This is a difference common to regular armed forces versus secret intelligence entities. But in each case, the dilemma must be answered: How to teach deadly skills without empowering undisciplined, unstable or dangerous people? An even greater dilemma confronts those who think deeply about such subjects. What does one do if the national command authority becomes insane or evil? This is a non-trivial problem for career professionals sworn to protect their sovereign and his or her government.

### **The Ultra-Brief History that led to things like the MCMAP and the Tao Do**

In the beginning, people fought with sticks and stones, and even those tools were preceded by the hands and feet and teeth of our animal ancestors. Each development of weapons brought its own defensive responses, but the hands and feet and fangs never left us, nor the limbic neural systems so attuned to mortal combat of the ancient kinds. So even modern killing technology is usually deployed by human beings with human feelings and elaborate, but human command systems.

Thus from the beginning, rulers have had to worry about how to control the armed forces they hired, trained, equipped, funded and otherwise empowered. We will run through very briefly, some highlights of that complex and trans-continental history. Those include Homer's Iliad and the start of Greek Olympics, the advice of Sun Tzu to his Chinese generals and emperors in about 600 BCE, the birth of Korean styles and why they matter near 50 BCE. The Koreans matter because they are a small people who have been pinned between China and Japan for thousands of years, and occupied by both during many brutal times. Yet Koreans preserved their own language and culture all this time. Few have thought so hard about how to fight with what you have on your own body as the Koreans. We remember the Roman Coliseum that opened in 72 CE and which served for three hundred years as a venue for exploring and displaying a diverse array of martial arts, and we remember the founding of the Shaolin Temple in China about 500 CE, a place where gentle Buddhist Monks studied arts of fighting for over 1100 years before Chinese Emperor K'ang Hsi had the temple burned down by his army in 1674 CE.

As has so often been the case in human history, the enlightened ones who fought only with hands under strict moral codes and mainly for training in broader disciplines, were defeated by larger armies using bigger weapons funded by some politician worried about his grip on power. In the end, the emperors always fall also, but that is a larger story than we have time and space for here.

In Japan, Bushido ethics began to emerge with the Samurai during the warring period between the Taira and Minamoto families from 1156 – 1185 CE. Bushido comes in many flavors, like schools of physical style and codes of ethics everywhere, but the basic idea is balancing duty to one's employer or sovereign with duty to others like the profession and 'the people.'

Three centuries later the Okinawan "Te" and Chinese Shaolin boxing styles began to mix as part of trade between the countries. Te style itself derived from a former Okinawan King, Sho Shin, who banned the carrying of arms in 1477, which also occurred in Japan in 1586 (3). Open hand fighting skills have often been promoted (without intention) by despotic rulers who outlawed weapons for ordinary citizens.

In 1867, a more primitive set of boxing rules in England was replaced by one certified by the "Marquess of Queensbury," and in 1882 Jigoro Kano modified traditional Japanese Jujitsu to develop the more modern art of Judo. In 1928 the Shaolin temple records were burned again (those pesky Buddhist monks, always getting into trouble teaching ethics) and early in the 1930's a Czech named Imi Lichtenfeld began developing "Krav Maga" which became the root of Russian and later Israeli hand-to-hand methods. The Israelis also teach the philosophy of the Mangoday of Yasotay even though Yasotay may be an entirely fictional figure! (4) Physical bodies are less important to some aspects of instruction than to others, especially when it comes to fighting spirit, strategy and other mental fundamentals of the universal art. In 1935, "Karate" became the official name of the Okinawan martial arts based on the traditional art of "Te" (hand) and the term "Kara" (empty or unarmed). But I emphasize again that the human body only moves in so many ways, and the ways that can kill another human being have been examined in intimate detail by fighters from many traditions over the entire history of human kind. To this day, millions of young men beg us for instruction, and they are served well or poorly by teachers all over this earth.

In 1942 Morihei Ueshiba began using the term “Aikido” to describe his art, and he wrote a book describing why restraint of the killing impulse was so central to this gentler but very effective form (5). Ueshiba wrote: “The Way of the Warrior has been misunderstood as a means to kill and destroy others. Those who seek competition are making a grave mistake. To smash, injure, or destroy is the worst sin a human being can commit. The real Way of a Warrior is to prevent slaughter – it is the Art of Peace.” This is very like Tao Do. In 1945 Choi, Yong Sool traveled back to Korea after studying under Sokaku Takeda in Japan, and began teaching what would later be called “Hap Ki Do.” They are now the masters of escaping grabs, and have been studied by all others, like the boxers have been studied for use of the upper body, the Tae Kwan Do masters for the kicking arts, and the organized armed forces for efficient use of weapons.

In 1957 Tae Kwan Do became the official name of the Korean martial arts, and was taught to South Korean soldiers. In 1972 Judo became an official Olympic sport, like the ancient Greco-Roman wrestling that endures to this day. In 1978 the South Korean Special Warfare Command adopted a new form called Tukong Moosul developed by Jan Su-ok, but like almost every “new” form this is just the collection of techniques that best served that teacher. We all draw from a common inventory, and we all have favorite techniques. We also know others where someone else is better. In 1993, a Brazilian Jujitsu man named Royce Gracie won the first Ultimate Fighting Championship, reminding the world of something that serious fighters have known for millennia. Within seconds of most hand-to-hand encounters, someone is on the ground, often both, and from that point on grappling techniques are more important than fancy kicks and artsy forms of punching. The Gracie family had been perfecting those for a generation in Brazil, and won applause by beating everyone else for a while. Professional soldiers never forget that all the rules that protect athletes in competitions do not apply to men on fields of actual, lethal battle.

Where are the ethics in all of this?

### **Ethics, WMDs, and the “Clashes of Civilizations”**

We are witnessing today an alleged “Clash of Civilizations” between militant Islam and the West in general or Christianity and Judaism in particular. Certainly there is conflict, and this has been used to justify a “Global War on Terrorism” without clearly definable targets or end. Already it has caused some leaders of the quest for human rights to abandon long sought restraints by rules of war like the absolute prohibition on torture enshrined in the Geneva Conventions, the UN Convention Against Torture and in U.S. domestic law until that was “reinterpreted” by leaders without morals.

Many who watch international affairs worry about another “clash of civilizations” as China rises relative to the West in economic activity and military ‘vigor.’ Those who know the deeper realities of martial art also know that this is by no means necessary, and that all our problems can be solved without destroying our adversaries—one of many complications that follow the ruthless school of international affairs. As participants will see firsthand and graphically, that does not require any form of supine pacifism or ignorance of how to fight if fighting is truly necessary.

There is something different about the modern era that animates much of this concern. That something is called “Weapons of Mass Destruction” or WMDs in this paper (WMD is the common acronym). WMDs were created by nation states, many of which are now terrified by the thought that ordinary people might possess them. If you did, and they found out, you would be labeled a “terrorist” immediately and be subject to extermination if not worse. Why?

Because the current model of “nation-state” includes a presumption that “the state” has exclusive rights to use violence against people. And by derivation, states assume exclusive rights to own at least some kinds of weapons. Exactly what kinds of weapons citizens are allowed to own varies a lot from country to country, but all countries allow weapons in their armies that are forbidden to ordinary folk. WMDs provide the extreme examples that animate a million nightmares because one man with a ‘good’ nuclear warhead could lay waste millions (billions if he knew where ‘best’ to detonate it). One man with the ‘best,’ most exotic biological weapon could kill millions or billions. We really do not know exactly, because the evil genies in that bottle are so scary that few specialists want to go there. But nations, being what they are, can always find someone to hire to do lethal research if they really want to.

Well, the convergence of WMDs with the emergence of modern information technologies that can spread knowledge like head lice (better actually) have really frightened the powers that be on this earth at this time. 9/11 provided high-voltage accelerant to that, so they are now terrified that “terrorists” may acquire some of the same weapons the nation-states have developed. Or worse, create even better weapons in some teenager’s lab, like the scenarios of cyber warfare.

During interesting times like these, thoughts of ancient philosophers, and of modern philosophers about how to restrain the violent impulses of human beings might be valuable. As a practitioner of a philosophical martial art, I pass a few on to you now. Some say that “Karate is for Defense **ONLY!**” Sensei Ueshiba said, “Do not look upon this world with fear and loathing. Bravely face whatever the gods offer.” And Tao Do says that Warriors must always remember that violence is the last resort of the incompetent. I teach soldiers and spies to remember that too.

There is no honor in slaughtering the multitude because millions of innocents live there who are the future of our species. And there is no human problem that cannot be solved by dialogue if you can be patient enough. Yes, there are some very rare moments when the only solution to a very urgent problem (like a real terrorist with a real bomb) involves the violent death of the dangerous one. But there are millions of moments when fear overcomes prudence, and people **think** that waging a war against a population or a nation state is the only answer. Do not be deceived by “worst case scenarios.” Professionals must consider those. That is what true Warriors are for. How to cultivate the genuine Warrior Ethic is a topic for another day.

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